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SUBJECT: COIN SUCCESS IN ALASAY VALLEY PROVIDES LESSONS FOR
A NEW APPROACH TO AFGHANISTAN

REF: KABUL 843

Classified By: PRT and Sub-National Governance Counselor Valerie C. Fowler for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S) Summary: Ongoing military operations in the Alasay Valley of Kapisa Province have produced rapid and meaningful effects, not just in pushing out insurgents, but also opening important political and governance opportunities. Despite a continued insurgent threat, the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and the Government of Afghanistan (GIROA) now appear to have a counter-offensive advantage in Alasay. The return of GIROA authority there has unleashed complex competition for political legitimacy that has replaced conflict between armed groups and effectively excluded Islamic extremists from participation. This political advance is equivalent to a military defeat of the enemy and constitutes a counter-insurgency (COIN) success. Many of the lessons from this success could serve as useful policy recommendations as we adopt a new strategy in Afghanistan. These recommendations are rooted in a course of action that continues enemy-centric operations while managing the transition to population-centric operations in the areas of security, governance, development and information. End Summary.

Key Political Effects

¶2. (S) Key political effects of military action in Alasay are becoming evident with the restoration of GIROA authority more than one year after the Afghan National Army (ANA) abandoned the valley to the Taliban. First, most of the 30,000 occupants of Alasay appear to have responded quickly and positively to the fact of government presence, holding almost daily shuras with authorities at which representatives of the U.S. PRT and French Task Force (TF) Tiger are welcome.

Politically, Governor Abu Bakar has moved to restore political dominance by replacing the District Administrator and other provincial officials who were not associated with his Hezb-i-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG)faction. Even though the changes have unleashed resentment among the non-HIG minority, the new leadership is already well-integrated into the population and appears to be serious about getting down to work.

¶3. (S) Divisiveness and challenges are sure to continue in Alasay. However, these will not be the result of armed conflict, but rather will be the products of structural weaknesses of GIROA, particularly its over-centralized system and inadequate links between local, provincial and national levels of government; corrosion of traditional practices and institutions resulting from decades of war; pre-existing tribal and community conflicts; and the upcoming national elections. Second, the GIROA reconciliation effort in Alasay

(reftel) indicated above all that the Taliban has lost the contest for legitimacy in that region. If it is correct that HIG groups constitute a majority of remaining fighters, these groups should also be susceptible to influence from the Governor and HIG political wing. Finally, the uniformly expressed desire for an end to war is more meaningful to the people than defeating an ambiguously defined enemy.

Targeting and action recommendations

14. (S) In order to continue enemy-centric operations while managing the transition to population-centric operations in Alasay, we have developed the following recommendations. Many of the broader recommendations - in the areas of security, governance, development and information operations - might be adopted as standard COIN tools across the areas of operation in the east and the south in order to begin to shift behavior.

Security:

- Sustain CF-supported ANSF presence in Alasay over the long-term and continue military operations, probably for the next several months. This will further separate the Taliban from the population and confine insurgent presence as far up the adjoining Schken and Schpey Valleys as possible. Now is the time when targeted direct action against Taliban leaders will have maximum effect. The cost of ANSF withdrawal would be to produce a vacuum the Taliban will not hesitate to refill, with a cumulative negative effect of having abandoned the population twice in succeeding years.

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- Prior to clearing Sultankhel Mountain above Alasay, verify reports that the majority of fighters there are in fact predominantly local HIG. Request through Key Leader Engagements (KLEs) with the Governor, National Directorate of Security (NDS), and other officials their opinions regarding the preferred course of action, which may well lead to an attempt at negotiated disarmament.

- Bind the population to the security forces through non-coercive action. Measures should include constant interaction with local leaders, carefully following Rules of Engagement (ROE) for conducting house searches, delivering humanitarian and medical assistance, and avoiding aggressive attempts to disarm the population at large (as opposed to detecting and removing insurgent weapons such as IED materials).

- Support and facilitate the GIROA reconciliation effort by ensuring access of intermediaries to combatants, coordination of movement and weapons hand-ins, participation in ceremonies, recognition of Program Takhim-e Solh (PTS, or "Strengthening the Peace" reconciliation program) documents, and provision of humanitarian aid and employment. While continuing to assess the likelihood that insurgent leaders are using reconciliation to maneuver for time, the intent of adopting this posture is to create a dynamic in which fighters remove themselves from the battlefield and adhere to GIROA authority.

Governance:

- While developing awareness of the multi-layered political competition in Alasay to the degree possible, avoid direct involvement in internal disputes. This is the responsibility of provincial government and Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG), contrary to the approach of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA's) Tagab Stabilization initiative.

- Remain aware that local officials and leaders have political agendas and calculations, including desire for

financial gain, that drive all interactions with the United States. These agendas do not necessarily coincide with U.S. good intentions, although awareness of underlying motives can lead to opportunities for pursuing U.S. objectives. We inevitably influence, but cannot control outcomes. This applies especially to Governor Abu Bakar, who still requires U.S. power and projects to secure both political support and physical security.

Development:

- Apply the principle of contingency when planning and implementing quick impact (QIP) and other development projects, excluding humanitarian assistance, MEDCAPS, and assistance to victims of conflict.
- Remain cognizant that U.S. projects are not gifts to the Afghan people in the hope of producing automatic gratitude or support for GIROA. These projects are an instrument of power, and their impact will be increased to the extent project activities are exchanged for specific commitments that enhance GIROA and ANSF legitimacy and authority.
- For example, before CF begins to repair the road from Tagab to Alasay District Center, district leaders must agree at minimum to tell Taliban and other armed fighters that they are not welcome in their villages. They must know that informing authorities of insurgent presence and the locations of weapons caches will be an important demonstration of commitment. Before CF agrees to even minor mosque repair, mullahs and elders must agree to welcome ANSF and GIROA publically and privately, and to say publically that the CF are not fighting a war against Islam.

Information Operations:

- Shift messages away from the negative focus on "defeating the enemies of Afghanistan."
- Emphasize positive messages of "bringing peace to Alasay Valley" and asking for the people's help "to liberate Afghanistan from foreign extremists."
- Incorporate statements from administration officials into IO messages. For example, cite Al Jazeera's live coverage of

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President Obama's Turkey speech: The U.S. "is not and will never be at war with Islam."
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